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Iconic span reaches into the history of Bellaire area

Great Stone Viaduct Historical Education Society steams ahead

July 13, 2012

By MICHAEL SCHULER , For The Times Leader

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BELLAIRE The history of railroads and Bellaire have been linked since before the Civil War, and now a dedicated group of local men and women from all walks of life, have formed the Great Stone Viaduct Historical Education Society, and are working to keep and promote the railroad heritage that transformed Bellaire and its landscape.

With 43 stone arches, the Great Stone Viaduct is Bellaire's most recognizable landmark that helped to shape not only the Ohio Valley, but the whole of the county. Using this structure to identify the society, the board of trustees is working to preserve that landmark and to let others know about the rich transportation history that railroads once brought to the area. The society is planning an educational forum on Aug. 18 at the Bellaire Public Library, which will include other activities to take place outside the library and under the arches of the bridge itself.

The group's board of directors is hoping to lead the efforts to preserve the historically important structure that is a part of the community by keeping the history of railroading alive for enthusiast of all ages. The society will sponsor a street railroad train for rides along Bellaire's streets for children of all ages, and hope to have many crafters setting up shop under the arches of the Great Stone Viaduct between Union and Guernsey streets. In addition, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Historical Society from Baltimore, Md., will bring its "Company Store" to the library for sales to the general public. Other exhibits will be placed in the library, including a special exhibit commemorating the railroad photographs of Bellaire, Ohio, taken by famed railroad photographer J. J. Young Jr.

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The exhibit is entitled "J.J. Young, Jr.: In His Own Words."

Being made available to all charter members of the society at no charge is a watercolor created by Joanne Cochran Sullivan, a member of the Great Stone Viaduct Historical Education Society. The painting is helping to commemorate the Society's formation and the viaduct. The watercolor depicts the last train to ever pass over the western portion of the bridge in 1996 before those tracks were abandoned. That portion of the bridge is still owned by CSX railroad, and is perhaps the most beautiful part of the bridge because of its graceful curve to the west below Rose Hill.

The water color painting by Sullivan is the first to be offered to the public in this Charter year of the founding of the Great Stone Viaduct Historical Education Society.

"The painting highlights one of the most prominent structures of the All American Town and showcases the importance of its use in Bellaire's history," Sullivan said. "It is my second painting of the Stone Bridge. I have also painted a winter scene of the Bellaire Park and the Bellaire High School Clock Tower."

Watercolors are just one of Sullivan's hobbies. Photography is another, which she sometimes uses for her paintings. She is active in the Bellaire Presbyterian Church, as well as the Friends of Wheeling Preservation Group. Having been born and raised in Bellaire, Sullivan said preserving Bellaire's rich history is important to her, which is what attracted her to the society. "It is the perfect marriage between the preservation of our valley's historic structures and my hometown of Bellaire Ohio."

Other members of the Great Stone Viaduct Education Society's board of directors are Daniel Frizzi, Jr., James Cochran, Michael Schuler,

Larry Siebieda, Lillian Siebieda, Joanne Cochran Sullivan, Sue Douglas, Erica Keller, William Kasko, James Williams and Paul Cramer.

Frizzi, who is chairman of the Board of Trustees, commented "I am extremely pleased with the makeup our board of trustees, each of whom bring to the table their own special skills to assist the Society in reaching its goals. This group brings legal, accounting, media, architectural, fundraising, artistic, development, education, tourism, government and graphic design experience to our Board, and this is critical to being successful in achieving our ultimate goal of protecting and preserving the Great Stone Viaduct", Frizzi added.

The Great Stone Viaduct Historical Education Society is a non-profit and non-partisan corporation and consists of two classes of membership Governing Members and Participating Members. Governing Members are elected from the Participating Members by the Society's Board of Trustees. Participating Members pay annual dues and enjoy the rights and privileges of the Society.

Because this is the Charter Year for the organization, interested persons can become Charter Members which allow them special benefits and discounts to events sponsored by the Society. This includes the watercolor print created by Joanne Sullivan without charge, free admittance to the lectures to be presented on Aug. 18, and a free box lunch during the walking tour of the bridge. The program sponsored by the Society on Aug. 18 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Community Room of the Mellott Memorial Library will bring speakers who will provide much history on the Great Stone Viaduct and the river crossings before the bridge was constructed. John P. Hankey, former B & O Railroad Museum curator will deliver the keynote address, and in the afternoon session will discuss the westward movement of the B & O Railroad to Wheeling. Mr. Hankey has been involved in many preservation projects throughout the United States to preserve the nation's railroad history.

Also on hand will be Roger Pickenpaugh, author and historian, to discuss the use of railroads during the Civil War, and the important river crossings at Bellaire, and rail transportation during that conflict. Attorney Dan Frizzi Jr., who is also an author and historian on local railroad history, will speak about the construction of the Great Stone Viaduct and present photographs of the bridge throughout its history.

Greg Levy of the Wheeling & Lake Erie Railroad will conclude with a presentation about the current rail operations, and the future operations of the W & LE railroad.

The cost of admission is \$18 and includes box lunch. All activities outside the community room are open to the public. Ticket purchases for the Street Train Rides, and boarding of the train, will take place on Guernsey Street at the library. Any crafters interested in setting up shop under the arches of the Great Stone Viaduct should contact the Society immediately to reserve space under the arches.

For more information on the Great Stone Viaduct Historical Society, call 740-676-2743 or email GSVSociety@aol.com. Brochures for registration will be mailed or sent by email to all interested persons.

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